

# On the enigma of identifications

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**A**gustín comes to my office stating that he is a young homosexual with adjustment problems. I find myself with a “sexually indeterminate” 23-year-old. His appearance is delicate, fragile, graceful, scraggy shoulder-length blond hair and an engaging smile, wearing an outfit that consists of a long wraparound silk skirt, a baggy white blouse and a bag hanging from a shoulder strap.

A Tazio appears in my office, the Tazio from Thomas Mann’s “Death in Venice”. In a soft voice he tells me about all the anxiety he has suffered ever since he was a child. About obsessions, bad dark thoughts, vomiting, bulimia, alcohol. About his vital bewilderment, of making and removing tattoos. About not being able to cut himself or attempt suicide, but how these thoughts are always in his mind.

There is little mention of his childhood, a private school and, after coming of age, his studies in London where he studies Fine Arts. Moving to another European city to finish his degree.

He works in sculpture, in a studio at the family home where he currently resides after having returned to Madrid, and where he feels welcomed by his parents who he says are tolerant and do not interfere in his life. He exhibits his works in the central European city to which he continues to be closely linked.

He uses two adjectives when describing his parent figures: a strong mother and a weak father. He then embellishes with comments, like his preference for his mother, with whom he shares his work, she works in interior design. An architect father, afraid, unknown and unappreciated due to the conventionalities and stereotypes of his station in life. Agustín was convinced he had always been very close to his mother and to the female figures around him, the girls at school and female friends who have stuck with him during these years. He is also certain of being very different to his father and of not understanding each other.

His problems with cleanliness started at age twelve, “everything disgusting” and self-imposed prohibition of “not touching.” He had began performing rituals such as

holding his own dirty clothes to his body to overcome some non-specific fear. Rituals that have continued as well as varied, and that at this time of his life control his sleep and eating habits (bulimia attacks and ritualized vomiting).

He tells me about a meaningful relationship with a girl older than him, which lasted a few years. Wondering if it were just a crush that began when he was a child and that waned over time. He has also had a partner, a boy, when he was finishing his degree. He now states that he has no interest in sex.

Our Tazio says that he is neither homosexual or heterosexual. He does not seem too concerned about choosing his sex, at least not in the short time his analysis lasted with me.

How can Agustín’s ambiguity be viewed? What causes the emotional lability of his sexual identity?

Is he subject to a theory of sexuality based on gender identity, applying the adjective “strong” to the female gender and “weak” to the male one? Equivalent to imaginary identifications.

Are the identifications made throughout his life sufficient to determine his sexuation of being a man or a woman?

Do his clinical manifestations comply with some disorder of castration anxiety? Will there be forclusion of the Name-of-the-Father and of the phallic function in his psychic structure? Or are we facing a neurosis?

Is his detachment from any interest in his sexuality connected with sublimation and libidinal deposition in his work, sculpture?

The ambiguity arouses uncertainty, indetermination, confusion. Coexisting attitudes that are not exclusive and that can be interpreted differently. With ambiguity, the swing between two terms is not used to establish a comparison, but rather to match them without differentiating two contradictory terms. (Bleger, J. (1984). “Not being homosexual” or “heterosexual” or being both. Not being masculine or feminine, or believing to be both, or a combination of male and female. A concept different to that of ambivalence, if opposite aspects within the

same object at the same time are considered.

In Freudian thought theories about sexuality are entered in the general drive theory. In "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality" Freud, S.(1905) tells us "In human beings pure masculinity or femininity is not to be found either in a psychological or biological sense". He goes on to argue that the only thing that the unconscious knows is active-passive opposition, and based on this the masculine and feminine, psychic bisexuality and male-female sexual dimorphism will be deferred. There is, therefore, no representation of the difference between the two sexes.

In childhood everything revolves around a single sexual organ for both, the male one. Child sexuality takes place under the primacy of the phallus and castration anxiety.

We shall say that reaching sexual maturity involves a development that converges the fate of the drives, the structuring of the Oedipus and castration complex, identifications and how inscription of sexual difference arises.

Unlike Freud, who suggests bisexuality from the very outset, Stoller's gender theory (Stoller, R. J. 1984) proposes a primordial femininity, and transsexual individuals would be those who fail to overcome the state of identity confusion with their mother.

Up until now, Chilland, C.(1999) reminds us that there was a male/female dichotomy that belongs to one or the other sex. No "third sex", "uncertain sex" or "intermediate sex" is proclaimed. Nevertheless, she posits that there are individuals who are between two sexes. Germany has just passed a bill, dated 15/08/2018, accepting the "third sex". In addition to male and female, the term "inter" or "diverse" will be allowed on the birth register. The new law will establish that as long as a person "feels deeply" that they belong to a certain gender, then they have the right to choose how they are legally identified (Huffpost Agency EFE). Nonetheless, legal recognition does not solve the identification enigma.

We think that birth and assignment of sex as a boy or girl is only the beginning of a long complex process to becoming men and women and reaching the subjective sex, i.e. with which each one identifies. Because being male or female are two significantants that represent these two subjective positions.

In order to attain the subject's sexuality, a

symbolic order and significant identifications are required. Access to this symbolic order for a son subjected to the symbiotic identification relationship with the mother will be unlikely. In psychosis, absence of the father figure as a representative of the law will make identification with masculinity difficult.

When speaking about identifications, Freud describes how in the male, identification with the father as an ego ideal is going to be accompanied by establishing the mother as a sexual object and it is within this confluence where the Oedipus complex arises. This identification, which we are interested in highlighting, is that in which, in order to achieve the ego ideal, the subject identifies with a trait or partial aspect of the object, which is introjected at the end of the Oedipus complex. And this common element that is repeated in each of the significant events is what Lacan is going to call the unary trait. He also goes on to coin the term Sexuated Identification, (Dyland, E. 1997) establishing differences with this second form of Freudian identification. To do this, he uses the concept of phallic function and, at the same time, introduces the jouissance function linked to the castration complex.



Along with other authors, we wonder that if core identity is not based on anatomical sex or gender as suggested by Stoller, and identifications are not enough to account for the process to determine whether we are male or female. There must be something else.

In her book "Sexual Ambiguities" Morel, G. (2002) asks, if human beings struggle to orientate themselves with regard to sexualisation, if they find it difficult to alienate the male side or female side, should we not assume a true void at the beginning and not a core identity?

Freud postulates a void when he states that there is no female drive but only a single libido, masculine in nature, or when he places the phallus and the castration complex at the centre of sexual life, both in boys and girls. We find this same idea in Lacan, who expresses this nothingness through aphorisms: "There is no sexual relationship", "Woman does not exist". Both suggest two anatomical sexes but only one single principle of sex in the unconscious, the phallus, as the only reference.

Will the permanence or departure of sexual ambiguity rest on the vicissitudes of the phallus?

What place do anatomy, the discourse of the other, identifications, ways to satisfy the drive occupy to achieve the sexualisation of being a man or a woman?

In order to tackle this question, we turn to Lacan, who introduces the concept of "sexualisation" (Miras, V.2005) He defines this term to name that long, complex process of the relationship of each subject with their sexual position, which may or may not coincide with their anatomical sex, and that may or may not orient it towards the choice of a different-sex partner.

Morel, G. (2002) follows Lacan by building a theory of sexualisation, which she calls analytical anatomy, comprising of three conceptual stages around that of the phallic function. Initially, that which refers us to biological discourse, natural anatomy. Then, or second stage, comes that of social discourse, when others interpret the subject's sex. For which a choice has already been made: inscribing or not to the master signifier of sexual discourse, the phallus. In psychotic structures rejection of this inscription appears, through foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father and phallic significance.

What happens if the subject contradicts the interpretation that others give to the subject's sex? What does the subject reject, anatomical sex or inscription to the phallic function?

The third stage is that of sexualisation per se, the unconscious choice of sex by the subject and which refers us to analytic discourse. As we have been saying, there is only one function of universal jouissance, the phallus, however, there are two sexes corresponding to

two "sexualised identification options". We shall say that Lacan (Braunstein, N. A. 1990) addresses the problem of sexual identification, favouring jouissance. In other words, he considers sexualisation of the body from an unconscious choice that the subject makes in relation to jouissance. And he speaks about how men and women are going to locate themselves with respect to the phallus, namely on the side of the masculine or feminine position. The fact that there are two inscriptions related to the jouissance mode in relation to the phallus does not contradict that a neurotic subject maintains a sexual ambiguity or, in the case of psychosis beyond phallic inscription, invents a particular sexualisation. As with female orientated jouissance in Schreber's case (Freud, S.1910).

What happens when there is a psychotic outbreak that causes a catastrophe in the subject's life and the identifications fail? What can the subject fall back on to cope with this catastrophe?

Without going too far into the Lacanian model, we can refer to the concept of "sinthome" as that which guarantees the presence of the father and the endurance of the bond with him. In seminar XXIII Lacan, J. (1975-76) shows how Joyce's art has a sinthome function: "This art compensates for the lacking father, it supplements a de facto foreclosure".

Joyce's work is a literary symptom, and it is also the sinthome. Joyce creates a name for himself and it is not a delusional metaphor, because his literary symptom has the identifying function of his own name. Based on this case, what Lacan underscores is the importance of the artifice (along the lines of an ingenious means) in constituting the subjective structure.

In neurosis jouissance is subject to the law, related to the phallic function and therefore subject to the limitations imposed by the symbolic father, agent of castration. In psychosis, the lack of the Name-of-the-Father signifier leads the subject to construct that artifice, the sinthome, through delirious metaphor or, as we have just seen in the case of Joyce, through art.

We wonder: What void do the symptoms, ghosts and sexual ambiguity occupy in our patient Agustín?

Can we regard the patient's artistic work as a particular symptom?

Could there ever be a psychic collapse? In which case, could it be held within the sculpture, operated as a sinthome?

These and other questions present us with possible theoretical discussions and clinical observations that clearly show the capacity of the psychoanalytic field to face new challenges when it comes to give meaning to current problems.

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